

Inspection report for Pen Green Centre for Children and Families

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Linked school if applicable	Pen Green Centre for Children and Families - Maintained Nursery School URN 131232
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Pen Green Centre for Children and Families EY356011

The inspection of this Sure Start children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

This inspection was carried out by three of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the senior leadership team, staff and family workers, representatives from the local authority and the governing body, health and social work professionals, parents and other users of the centre's facilities.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Pen Green Centre is an integrated centre for children and their families, a phase one children's centre and maintained nursery school, located in the town of Corby, Northamptonshire. The centre was established on the present site in 1983 and was run as a local Sure Start programme from 1999 to 2006. This centre was the first children's centre in the country to receive designation in 2004; maintained nursery school status followed in 2006.

Corby has a strong connection with Scotland and with Eastern European countries including Latvia, Serbia and Croatia. Over the past decade, there has been a significant change in the demographics of the area, with families predominantly from Poland, Russia, Turkey and Zimbabwe settling in the community. The reach area also includes two designated Traveller sites. Currently, 17 languages are spoken within the nursery and 14% of the community are from minority ethnic groups.

Four of the eight super output areas are in the 30% most deprived areas in the country. Over 900 children aged under five years reside in the area, of which 25% live in workless households and 18% live in poverty. The percentage of adults achieving level one and level two qualifications in Corby is above the national, county and East Midlands average percentage rates. However, the gap widens at level three and level four where the qualification level among the adult population is significantly

lower than is typically found. Most children enter early years provision with skills and knowledge below age-related expectations.

The centre provides a wide range of services to families including baby and toddler provision, nursery, crèche, after school club and holiday play scheme. The nursery school provides places for 240 children on a flexible and part-time basis. The setting also offers a wide range of family support including family visiting, family room, therapeutic groups, young parents and fathers groups and community education. The centre is open 48 weeks each year, seven days a week. The centre includes a research base which provides a range of training and qualifications up to doctoral level.

The delivery of the extended services has been delegated by the local authority to the headteacher of the nursery school, who is also the director of Pen Green. The work of the centre is monitored by the governing body. Partner agencies include health professionals, local schools, Home-Start, children’s social care and the on-site research base. An outreach team provides targeted support for families within the community.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children’s centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for families

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

The centre’s capacity for sustained improvement, including the quality of its leadership and management

1

Main findings

Leadership, governance and management are exceptional due a shared pursuit of excellence and highly effective partnerships between the centre’s partners, parents and the community. Accountability and supervision arrangements are robust and promote an ambitious continuous developmental programme for leaders, staff and parent volunteers. Careful consideration has been given to providing an extensive range of professional expertise across the wider team and partners enhancing the superb quality of provision and the best possible outcomes for families engaging with the centre. Self-evaluation is accurate, well informed and used rigorously to steer improvement and raise families’ aspirations, resilience and independence. The centre’s overall effectiveness and its capacity for further improvement are outstanding.

Parents refer to the centre as their community and their family confirming the centre is extremely well thought of and a genuine hub of the community. Engaging parents in the life and work of the centre is pivotal to success. Centre users are recognised as being essential drivers for development and improvement. Consequently, six parents sit on the governing body in addition to the large number of parents who play an extensive role in 'co-constructing' services at an operational and strategic level alongside staff, leaders and partner agencies. Behaviour and the sense of community cohesion are exceptionally strong.

The range of provision is extensive, exceptionally well matched to needs and continually developing in response to local circumstances and practitioner-based research. Commitment and persistent work have built parents' confidence in sustaining a lengthy engagement with the centre. Participation across services is high with a total of 91% of local families regularly engaging, in addition to over 2000 children who live outside the centre's reach area. Furthermore, the centre is engaging with the large majority of most of their targeted groups, including families from minority ethnic groups, disabled children and those who have special educational needs, young parents and children from workless households. The centre's improvement plans are firmly focused on improving the engagement of fathers and the number of new parents visited shortly after the birth of a child.

Outcomes for families are outstanding due to well-targeted and highly effective provision. Three generations of families maintain a strong connection with the centre and recognise the significant role it has, and continues, to play in their lives. 'It's like having someone wrap their arms around you to keep you safe,' states one such parent. Health outcomes for families monitored at the centre are good, and particularly strong in relation to adult and infant mental health. However, the local area of Corby experiences significant difficulties relating to poor health and, despite some well-targeted interventions, health outcomes are unstable with regard to breastfeeding rates, obesity, dental health and teenage conception in particular.

Parents consistently understand that high-quality parenting is crucial to keeping their children healthy, safe and motivated to learn and succeed in life. Extensive opportunities for parents to improve their economic stability through excellent volunteering opportunities and 'a second chance to pursue an education' have led to a significant number of parents taking up an incredible range of qualifications and subsequently gaining employment.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Build on the current strategic and operational approach to improving poor health trends across Corby to ensure a more concerted and rapid impact on health outcomes over time.

How good are outcomes for families?

1

'Pen Green is wonderful, having this place has helped me to face my problems, get help and move on,' and 'I would not be here today if it wasn't for the help of the centre.' Such testimonies are typical from parents who have received intensive mental health support following referral to 'Great Expectations' and 'GAP' ('Getting ahead of Post Natal Depression'). As a result, parents experiencing postnatal depression are helped to understand and overcome their illness. One parent confirmed, 'At my lowest, I didn't want my baby. Now my baby is everything to me.'

Despite a positive trend, the proportion of mothers continuing to feed their babies after six to eight weeks has declined. Obesity levels across Corby are well above the national averages. However, a persistent approach to reducing health inequalities is showing signs of success locally with an increase in the proportion of children accessing a dentist and a reduction in mothers smoking in pregnancy. Furthermore, 75% of mothers attending the breastfeeding drop-in have continued to feed their babies for longer periods of time. Teenage conception rates remain one of the highest in the country.

Parents, particularly those accessing specialist groups relating to domestic violence, develop an in-depth understanding of how to be effective parents. 'I rarely raise my voice because I don't have to,' reports one proud parent. Parents demonstrate an immense sense of trust in staff helping the centre sustain contact and improve stability and home life for looked after children in the area and children subject to child protection plans. Strategies such as the 'Team Around the Family' and the 'Common Assessment Framework' (CAF) provide highly personalised support and ensure families are exceptionally well safeguarded.

High-quality play and learning activities, exciting environments and skilful teaching ensure children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make excellent progress in their learning and development and improve their readiness for school. Although the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scores remain below national averages, robust assessment via the 'Making Children's Learning Visible' programme shows that children, particularly those from the most deprived areas, make great strides in their achievement with a considerable increase in their Profile scores. Disabled children, those who have special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language make equally good progress, given their particular needs and starting points and the individualised approach to their learning.

Parents are highly aspirational for themselves, and a significant number who left school with no qualifications undertake a wide range of accredited and higher-level qualifications, improving their chances of work. In addition to extensive family learning programmes, over 100 parents completed courses in childcare, numeracy, literacy and computing last year and everyone proceeded to find either employment, volunteering opportunities or moved on to further education.

A well-established volunteer programme provides a significant number of parents with opportunities to support and lead groups and design services. Over 50% of the staff team were formally parents attending the centre. Routine opportunities for parents to organise events and take a direct lead in shaping and developing service provision enable parents to play an impressive role in assessing need, accessing funding streams, and making operational decisions. A recent example is the co-construction of the 'Couthie' nursery provision. Parents' role in such matters is exemplary and significantly empowering.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	1
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	1
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	1
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	1

How good is the provision?

1

This busy and vibrant centre extends a warm and inclusive welcome which parents firmly embrace. 'It doesn't matter who you are or why you're here, there is something for everybody at Pen Green.' Such comments confirm parents' strong sense of belonging and the view expressed by one parent: 'Once you have visited the centre you never want to leave.' An extensive range of flexible, universal and discretely targeted provision is continually expanding in response to changing needs, an example of which is the welcoming 'Get Together Group' for families for whom English is not their first language.

Participation rates are excellent and centre data confirm a year-on-year improving trend with regard to the engagement of all target groups. Young parents have a strong presence within all groups, and flexible nursery provision and outreach services enable children from local Traveller sites to benefit equally. But despite persistence, designated weekend groups and some innovative practice, the centre has identified that there is further work needed to improve access and engagement of fathers and increase the number of new parents visited at an early stage. Improvement plans are firmly focused on this important work.

Referral pathways into services are swift and effective in the main, ensuring the centre engages with the large majority of new families at an early point. Careful assessment at the point of entry and an opportunity for parents to make progress at an individual pace ensure their full engagement with family support. The Common Assessment Framework is used extremely well and with increasing frequency. Recent changes in the process have improved access to early help and services and have prompted an increase in the number of children now able to access funded provision for two-year-olds.

The quality of Early Years provision in the nursery, crèche, 'Singing Group' and all other activities is consistently interesting, exciting and appropriately challenging for children. In addition, parents' engagement with the 'Making Children's Learning Visible' (PICL) assessment programme captivates their enthusiasm to know more about how children learn and values the role they play as their children's first educator. This is shown exceptionally well by the extensive knowledge parents have of 'schemas' and associated patterns of behaviour their children display. One parent proudly showing off her child's learning portfolio stated, 'When I think about his schema, it's like bringing learning to life at home.' The progression parents make, through the PICL approach, including those whose circumstances make them more vulnerable, is absolutely inspirational. Furthermore, parents' initial role as 'new start volunteers' routinely progress to group leaders and researchers and evaluators of service.

The care, guidance and support provided by the centre are outstanding. Parents make significant strides in their personal well-being, safety and education determined not to allow their problems to define them, or their families' futures. Families systematically access a broad range of services pertinent to their individual needs. Furthermore, they need only share their story once because of the seamless transition between one service and another. Parents confirm that the centre goes far beyond their expectations, be it transport to and from the 'Freedom Project', long-term and intensive home visiting or intimate support from the midwife in 'Great Expectations'. Parents state, 'Pen Green is just the best.'

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	1
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

Outstanding leadership and management and an unwavering commitment to improving services for children and families which builds their confidence and life skills underpin everything the centre does. The individual strengths of the highly qualified centre director, the centre leadership team and the governing body create a rich and diverse multi-disciplinary team which drives the development of innovative and relevant provision. Robust supervision and the opportunity for staff to reflect on their own work and that of their colleagues is valued as fundamental to sustaining best practice. The governing body has an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the work of the centre and its responsibilities. Governors regularly spend time in the centre, with each allocated a specific area of work to monitor. This ensures governors are well informed and equips them with the knowledge to both support and challenge the centre's leadership team effectively and with rigour.

There are strong links between strategic and development planning and service provision, all of which are target driven and based securely on accurate data and an in-depth understanding of the local community's needs. This helps to eradicate underachievement, reduce inequalities for the most vulnerable families and improve long-term outcomes, which is why the centre provides outstanding value for money. Extensive collaborative partnerships with Home-Start, health professionals and a significant number of others, ensure referral into the centre is systematic and provides an integrated approach to meeting needs. This is particularly evident for families whose needs are complex and require careful and consistent management.

Safeguarding arrangements are robust and Criminal Record Bureau checks meet statutory requirements. The extensive range of provision for new and young parents and their children, alongside the priority placed on nurturing a secure bond and relationship between them, promotes a strong emotional attachment which ultimately improves the safety and protection of children. All staff have an in-depth knowledge of safeguarding policies and procedures and the routine high-quality training they receive ensures they are well equipped to undertake their challenging roles. The parent governor with responsibility for safeguarding has been instrumental in developing information for parents which is accessible and clearly sets out everyone's responsibility in relation to safeguarding children. This ensures the development of a safe community and gives parents the confidence to turn to the centre for help before situations reach crisis point.

The centre is highly inclusive and continually striving to remove barriers to access. Diversity, such as that associated with the Traveller way of life, is celebrated very well, and excellent consideration is given to providing bilingual support to children and parents who speak English as a second language. This provides equality of opportunity by removing communication barriers to allow all families to express themselves and share their views. The centre strives to ensure that parents believe in themselves both as decision makers for themselves as individuals and as advocates for their children. The centre has high expectations that users and the wider community will not only participate, but become actively involved, in the co-delivery of services.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	1
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	1
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	1
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	1
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	1

Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

The inspection outcomes for Pen Green Centre for Children and Families registered and maintained nursery school provision have been considered as part of this inspection.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Pen Green Centre for Children and Families on 16–17 January 2013. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

First, we would like to say a big thank you to so many of you who came to talk to us during the inspection. It is very important for inspectors to hear your views because we really get to the heart of a centre and find out the difference it actually makes to you and your families. We are pleased to inform you that this children's centre really is the 'hub of your community', providing children and families from all backgrounds

with excellent services and activities, especially targeted at many families who really need it.

One of the key strengths of the centre is the way in which it supports those of you who experience significant difficulties in your lives due to mental health problems and domestic violence. Groups such as 'Great Expectations' and 'GAP' have provided you with a safe place to discuss fears and difficulties, get specialist help and take steps to deal with your problems. You told us consistently that, as a result, you have a stronger bond with your babies and have become 'happier and better parents'.

We found that both you and your children make astounding progress in your personal development and achievements because of high-quality learning opportunities for all of you. The extent to which you engage with your children's learning is outstanding! You are extremely enthusiastic about the 'PICL' (Parents Involved in their Children's Learning) programme and you really value the way in which it has taught you to respond positively to the way in which your children learn, play and behave. As a result, you are exceptionally knowledgeable about various patterns of play known as 'schemas' because of the valuable opportunities you have had to video and observe your children at play. You have confirmed that you use this knowledge to help build on your children's interests and to bring learning to life at home.

The centre is eager to improve some particular health issues which affect Corby residents so they ensure you receive lots of good advice about how to lead healthy lifestyles and the importance of dental health and regular exercise. As a result, you have lots of opportunities to cook healthy food in the 'Family Room', more pregnant mothers have stopped smoking and a large number of families have registered with a dentist. However, despite this hard work the centre is aware that more must be done to reduce teenage conception rates, levels of obesity in young children and raise parents' understanding of the importance and benefits of breastfeeding. So, we have asked the centre to build on this work in order to make more rapid improvements.

Discussions with lots of you confirmed that the centre provides you with an extensive range of services and activities which completely match your needs and make a massive difference to your safety, well-being and the opportunities you have to improve your lives. For example, a significant number of people have volunteer roles, and they frequently help to support and lead groups and provide activities within the 'Family Room'. Furthermore, six parents sit on the governing body, helping the centre leaders to make important decisions about all aspects of their work. These roles are extremely impressive and confirm that the centre really works with the community in every way it can. Equally impressive is the large proportion of adults who have raised their confidence and aspirations and welcomed a second chance to get an education. As a result, a significant number of you have completed various courses and qualifications enabling you to gain work and secure a better future.

The centre is strongly committed to providing services for everybody, particularly the most disadvantaged families and those most in need. It works tirelessly to support your community and listens to the views of families with regard to what they need. As a result, the centre has successfully encouraged a very large majority of families to access services, including young parents, children with particular needs and families from various backgrounds and cultures. One of you stated, 'It doesn't matter who you are or why you're here, there is something for everybody at Pen Green,' and we agree!

The leadership and management of the centre are highly effective because staff know your community extremely well and their work and plans are firmly focused on providing for your needs in the very best way they can.

Thank you again for speaking with us and we wish you the very best in the future.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.